

# Opinion Surveys

THE EUGENICS SOCIETY'S first survey of opinion was fully discussed in the July 1962 (54, 57-9) issue of the REVIEW, the questionnaire itself having been reproduced in the October 1961 number (53, 180-1). Briefly, this survey was addressed to 1,000 people whose names appear in *Who's Who*, 406 of whom returned completed questionnaires.

The Council of the Eugenics Society later decided to extend this inquiry and send the same questionnaire to educationalists: on a stratified plan, 3,992 names were taken from the membership list of the Association for Science Education and 1,349 from that of the Classical Association. Twenty-four questionnaires were not received by the scientists, leaving 3,968 effective names, of which 1,089 (27 per cent) replied. There were forty-two non-recipients among the classicists—this larger proportion is largely accounted for by the Classical Association's membership list being under revision at the time. An effective list of 1,307 names yielded 302 completed questionnaires (24 per cent).

These percentages represent a low level of response for surveys of this type, especially when compared with the *Who's Who* survey, where in addition to the 41 per cent who returned completed questionnaires a further 10 per cent were sufficiently interested to write and return uncompleted forms. There was no such response in the Educationalist survey. It would appear, therefore, that interest in the subject needs arousing, even among educated people, but that (not unexpectedly) the range of thought and sense of duty of those whose names appear in *Who's Who* are greater than average.

Broadly correct definitions of EUGENICS were given by 89 per cent of scientists and 92 per cent of classicists. This is a very similar figure to that found in the *Who's Who* sample, although the scientists and classicists tended to be more specific in their answers, quoting dictionary definitions or referring to the Greek derivation. Three out of four in each of the three groups indicated that eugenics is concerned with the

limitation of problem families and with providing facilities for voluntary sterilization; 9 per cent more scientists than classicists opted for "encouraging the birth of more children to families whose early born children show particular promise".

**CREATION OR NATURAL SELECTION:** 86 per cent of the scientists and 95 per cent of the classicists gave natural selection as their preference; neither group approached the remarkable *Who's Who* figure for a belief in "creation". There was, however, a significant group, particularly among classicists (15 per cent) who stated spontaneously that "natural selection and creation are not mutually exclusive".

**HEREDITY AND ENVIRONMENT:** Among scientists, seven out of ten considered that heredity has more effect upon intelligence than environment does. The comparative proportion among classicists is only slightly lower (65 per cent). About one in five of both groups considered both heredity and environment were equally important, though it is interesting to note that as many as one in ten of classicists felt that they did not know.

As in the previous survey, both groups tended to name the other influence as having the principal effect on social behaviour—74 per cent of scientists and 65 per cent of classicists said that environment was more important than heredity. The classicists here showed more certainty. One in four of the remaining respondents considered that both environment and heredity were of equal importance.

In the *Who's Who* survey 80 per cent supported the idea that research on human heredity should be carried out. Among classicists and scientists support was even higher—84 and 88 per cent respectively. Only 1 per cent in each group was against it. Knowledge that the questionnaire was put out by the Eugenics Society may have had some influence here. The main reason given for encouraging research is the general one that all knowledge is useful and that all research is justifiable on this ground, but

17 per cent of scientists and 10 per cent of classicists specifically mentioned the problems of inherited disease and defects.

**WORLD POPULATION CONTROL:** Nearly everyone (93 per cent) agreed that the population of the world was increasing fast, but as compared with the 44 per cent of the previous survey, only 38 per cent of classicists and 33 per cent of scientists thought it was too large in relation to the natural resources of the world. This perhaps is because scientists are more aware of the present misuse and maldistribution of world resources—11 per cent of them volunteered this statement. Of the classicists, 20 per cent were unable to give an opinion on this question. It seems extraordinary that about one person in ten should think that the population of the world is too *small* in relation to its resources. Nine out of ten people, however, still considered that we should try and control the increase in population and not rely on increasing world resources. To this end, the encouragement of the use of birth control was advocated by 80 per cent of the classicists and 85 per cent of the scientists (the same proportion as was shown in the *Who's Who* survey).

Reactions to specific suggestions about possible methods of controlling the population were again very similar to those shown in the previous survey. Only three methods showed differences of more than 5 per cent. Of scientists and classicists, 56 per cent recommended seeking to deter certain people from having children as compared with 63 per cent from *Who's Who*: fewer classicists than either other group were in favour of providing greater opportunities for voluntary sterilization, but on the other hand more were in favour of legalizing abortion. Only one-third of the educationalists were specifically against such a measure.

Throughout both surveys the three groups completing the questionnaire showed remarkable unanimity on many questions. The scientists are slightly, but only slightly, more in favour of eugenic policies and views than the classicists who, when they lag behind appear to do so from

lack of knowledge on technical points rather than from definitely opposed views. Both groups are more in sympathy with eugenic thought than the *Who's Who* sample, but the differences are marginal.

Reverting to the varying degrees of response elicited from these three groups of people, a comparison raises some interesting conjectures: the first, *Who's Who*, questionnaire was sent out under the name of Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Limited, the second inquiry under that of the Eugenics Society with a covering letter from the General Secretary; the replies were addressed to the *Society* and only the final analysis was made by Gallup Poll.

Apparently there are people who willingly reply to an anonymous inquiry but do not care to let their names become known to a committed organization—perhaps they fear further involvement in the form of eugenic propaganda or invitations to membership. On the other hand, in the *Who's Who* survey 43 per cent of the replies came from people who were aged sixty-five or over. No information on age was available in the later survey, but it seems likely that a much smaller proportion were beyond retiring age and that the replies came on the whole from a younger section of the community; there is also the point that many older people have more leisure to devote to the task of filling in a questionnaire.

Another point to be remembered, one which also applied to the *Who's Who* survey, is that those who take the trouble to fill in and return the forms are likely to be people who are already interested in the subjects involved and enjoy an opportunity of airing their views. Thus the samples which have been analysed may be overweighted on this side.

To sum up, the surveys have shown a general similarity of opinion among those of a random selection of three groups of educated people who elected to respond to the *Society's* questionnaire. These findings will be of valuable general information to the Council in guiding the actions and policies of the Eugenics Society during the coming months and years.